Testimony
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"Japan's relationship with its neighbors: Back to the Future?"

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Chairman Hyde, Congressman Lantos, Members of the Committee, it is a great honor to testify before you today on the subject of Japan's relationship with its neighbors. While the United States has a deep interest in recent developments in the Middle East, promoting US interests in Asia also remains a key US foreign and security policy priority. In order to sustain US leadership in this region, it is important that the United States pays close attention to relationships among key players in this region. In this context, it is natural that the United States maintains an interest in how this vital American ally relates to its neighbors, including the domestic factors that shape Japan's approaches to its neighbors.

The Committee could not have scheduled this hearing at a better time. As the Members may well be aware, Japan has undergone a great deal of change since Prime Minister Koizumi took office five years ago. To be sure, some of the changes he brought benefited US-Japan relations greatly. At the same time, Koizumi triggered developments that have raised concerns among Japan's neighbors as well as in some quarters in the United States. At minimum, many share the view that Japan's relationships with its immediate neighbors have come under considerable strain under Koizumi's watch.

As it looks almost certain that Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe will succeed Mr. Koizumi in roughly a week, now is a particularly opportune time to reflect on where Japan stands on various issues. When trying to answer questions regarding Japan's relationship with its neighbors, I believe it is useful to observe recent internal developments in Japan that have had a direct impact on its regional diplomacy.

In today's testimony, therefore, I would like to do four things. First, I would like to set the context of what we have been witnessing in Japan for the last five years. Second, I would like to discuss the developments that have been raising concerns among Japan's neighbors and some quarters in this country. These issues include attitudes of Japanese toward their nation's wartime past, Japan's relations with its China and the Republic of Korea, and the rise of nationalism in Japan. Third, I will discuss my view on how the upcoming change in the Japanese political leadership may affect these issues. Finally, I will conclude by saying a few words on what the United States can do to help ensure that the anticipated leadership change in Tokyo will lead to a positive outcome of these debates within Japan.

I. Where is Japan today? (The context)

The political developments in Japan for the last five years cannot be looked at in a vacuum. In my view, Japan is still in the middle of a journey to find its rightful place in the international community. This journey, which began in earnest with Japan's humiliating experience during the 1990-91 Gulf War, still continues today.

The 1990-91 Gulf War was a watershed event for Japan. As Members may well remember, Japan's extremely slow response to the international effort of liberating Kuwait from the invasion by Iraq brought severe criticism against Japan. This experience made Japan painfully aware that economic success alone would not buy it respect.

Japan also quickly began to realize that the security situation in East Asia had become less certain with the disappearance of an overarching Soviet threat. While the end of the Cold War ended the political divide in Europe, the division in East Asia remained—the Korean Peninsula remained divided, and no resolution of the cross-Strait issues was in sight. The 1993-94 North Korean nuclear crisis, the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, the 1998 North Korean Taepodong missile launch, and the 1999 and 2000 incursions by North Korean spy ships into Japanese territorial waters all made Japan feel increasingly vulnerable in the post-Cold War security environment.

Internally, public confidence in the governing system that had been in place in Japan since the end of World War II rapidly began to erode. A series of scandals that involved Japanese political leaders and senior government officials greatly disillusioned the public. The Japanese government's ability to manage crises was brought under severe scrutiny at the time of the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, further lowering public confidence in the government. Economic stagnation that began with the bursting of Japan's bubble economy of the 1980s further damaged public confidence in the government's ability to take effective measures to save the country from its economic downturn.

Furthermore, as Japan seeks to make a greater international contribution, it has become clear that the issues that Japan failed to address during the Cold War are handicapping Japan's ability to do more in international arena today. One example is Japan's effort to send the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) for non-combatant overseas multinational military operations. Domestically, the constitutional limitation on Japan's use of force and the interpretation that prohibits Japan from exercising the right of collective self-defense became major obstacles. Externally, the perception—particularly that among Japan's immediate neighbors—that Japan had not come to terms with its history prevented the emergence of political environment in East Asia that welcomed Japan's effort in this area.

Therefore, it would be fair to say that Japan found itself somewhat lost in the post-Cold War world. Domestically, the political and economic systems that had brought Japan stability and prosperity during the Cold War ceased to be as functional in the evolving post-Cold War environment. Externally, Japan faced the reality that economic wealth alone would not allow Japan to command the respect in the international community that it thought it deserved—yet, breaking out of its Cold War-era mold turned out to be difficult because of the issues Japan had not fully addressed during the Cold War. A sense of vulnerability, uncertainty, disillusionment, and stagnation was simmering in Japan, without any consensus about a vision of a new Japan.

It is in this context that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi took office in April 2001. For better or for worse, Koizumi was seen as an agent for change. In the eyes of the public, the qualities he brought to his position—leadership and decisiveness—were considered qualities that were missing in Japanese leadership during the 1990s but that were necessary to lead Japan out of its stagnation. This is why the developments under the Koizumi government need to be looked at as a part of Japan's ongoing attempt to seek its new identity, not as an isolated series of events.

II. Issues of concern—recent developments

Few dispute the proposition that Japan has undergone a great deal of change under Koizumi's watch. On the one hand, many of the changes were positive. For instance, the economic and structural reforms that were implemented by his government, although not as comprehensive and thorough as was initially promised, nevertheless helped Japan to revitalize its economy after a decade of stagnation. Capitalizing on his close personal relationship with President Bush, Koizumi was also successful in strengthening Japan's relationship with the United States, particularly in the security realm.

On the other hand, Koizumi's time in office witnessed the rise of new concerns. Among those that have attracted most attention are: Japan's view of its wartime legacy signified by the debate over Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine; Japan's relations with China and the Republic of Korea; and the rise of nationalism in Japan.

Japan's view of its wartime legacy

The debate over Japan's attitude in resolving issues related to its wartime past has existed throughout Japan's postwar history. However, Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine have brought unprecedented intensity to this debate. Critics say that Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine have empowered those in Japan who reject the conventional view of the history and who glorify Japan's aggressive behavior in Asia during the first half of the 20th century. Koizumi has countered these critics by asserting that his visits are meant to renew his vow for peace by paying respects to those who lost their lives during World War II. The museum located within Yasukuni Shrine's compound called *Yushu-kan* has also become the subject of criticism for the questionable views of the pre-1945 history that it presents. But Koizumi has also asserted that he does not agree with the views that are represented by the museum.

The issue with the history textbooks that are used in Japanese schools is another controversial issue. In April 2006, the textbooks approved by the Japanese government for local school districts to choose among included one written and published by a group that are said to subscribe to the view that minimizes Japan's conduct between 1900 and1945. Although this was not the first such instance of approval of a controversial textbook, this triggered strong criticism both from Beijing and Seoul, leading to large-scale anti-Japan protests in these countries.

Ultimately, the issue here is how Japan sees itself in the history of the first half of the 20th century. Does it abide by the conventional view that Japan, driven by a territorial ambition and reckless militarism, became the aggressor in Asia until its ambition was finally defeated by the Allied Powers in 1945? Or does it subscribe to an alternative view of the history that whitewashes Japan's wartime past and justifies its conduct in part as an act of self-defense and in part as a pattern of large-power behavior no different from what other nations had done?

An opinion poll on the issues specifically related to the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals conducted in May 2006 by the Asahi Shimbun, one of three major Japanese newspapers, provides us with some useful insights. First, the poll indicates that most Japanese do not subscribe to the view that glorifies Japan's militarist past—the poll shows that very few Japanese (merely seven percent) see World War II as a war of self-defense for Japan.

At the same time, this poll also reveals that Japan has not yet come to a national consensus on who was responsible for leading Japan down the path of militarist expansion and eventually to the devastation of World War II. The poll indicates that the public opinion is divided when asked who was responsible for the war. Over 50% of respondents attribute extremely heavy responsibility to the military leadership at the time. Close to 50% also think that political leaders at the time were heavily responsible for the war. Yet, close to 40% of the respondents also attribute "some" responsibility to the Emperor and media. Almost 70% of the poll respondents think that Japan has not done nearly enough to inquire why Japan went to war. Clearly, Japanese people themselves feel that they have much to do in this area.

I would argue that Koizumi's Yasukuni visits forced Japan to reflect on what World War II was all about for Japan—the issue that Japan has avoided tackling head-on. I would further submit that this is a healthy development, as Japan will not be able to move forward without reaching a closure on its past as a nation.

The Japanese government's argument that the history issues were resolved at the government level has legal legitimacy. After the conclusion of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, the Japanese government addressed the wartime reparations issue bilaterally, including with China and the Republic of Korea. With China, Japan first signed a peace treaty and accompanying Exchange of Notes with the Republic of China in 1952, in which the government in Taipei relinquished the right to file claims against Japan. This treaty was nullified when Japan and the People's Republic of China normalized relations in 1972, but the Chinese government confirmed in the Japan-China Joint declaration that it also would give up its right to file claims. The case with the Republic of Korea was a bit more complicated because the ROK was a Japanese colony during the war. Still, Japan signed a bilateral agreement with ROK that addressed the issue of claims in 1965.

Tokyo's claim that the government has apologized numerous times in the past also can be justified. The Japanese government has apologized 21 times by one account. In particular, the statement by the Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in 1995, which admitted Japan's wartime aggression and colonization of Asia and expressed "heartfelt apology" to those who suffered, is considered as an official apology from the Japanese government.

On the one hand, atonement for the past often has very little to do with what has been done legally, financially and politically. Wartime atrocities by the Japanese military had a direct impact on the individuals of the countries Japan colonized and invaded. In that sense, I feel that the Japanese government may be able to do more in tending to human

and emotional aspects of this issue. On the other hand, the Chinese and Korean governments need to be responsible in communicating to their peoples that they agreed to settle the reparation issue with Japan at the governmental level. Still, Japan cannot possibly address emotional and human side of the war unless it first comes to a national consensus on its own wartime history.

It is ironic that Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine seem to have triggered a process of self-reflection in Japan. Recently, major newspapers and journals are filled with commentaries and analyses that reflect on Japan's prewar conducts. Prompted by a recent revelation that the Showa Emperor expressed displeasure with the enshrinement of fourteen Class A War Criminals at the Yasukuni Shrine, the Japan Association of Bereaved Families (a group that Koizumi was said to court by visiting the Yasukuni Shrine) will likely begin to explore the possibility of enshrining Class A war criminals in a separate location within the compounds of the Yasukuni Shrine. A retired senior Japanese diplomat whose family member was designated as a Class A War Criminal also proposed a moratorium on Japanese political leaders' Yasukuni Shrine visits until a national consensus can be formed on its attitude toward its wartime past, and his proposal has been attracting substantial attention. But this debate has only begun, and it remains to be seen whether a consensus will emerge out of it.

Japan's relationship with China and the Republic of Korea: domestic perceptions

One of the biggest negative consequences of Koizumi's tenure is considerable aggravation of Japan's relations with China and the Republic of Korea. While it is true that Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine have been a major factor in the worsening of Japan's relations with these two countries—from Chinese and Korean perspectives, it has shown itself to be an important enough issue to suspend bilateral summit meetings—it also must be noted that the downturn of the two relationships have different characteristics as well.

Japan-China relations

There seems to be a prevailing perception that Japan's relationship with China has grown considerably worse under Koizumi's watch. While it is true that Japan-China relations have grown more openly hostile in the last five years, it is not accurate to suggest that the relationship was on an even keel before Koizumi came to the office. In fact, an examination of the annual public opinion poll on foreign affairs conducted by the Cabinet Affairs Office reveals that Japan's relationship with China has been on a downward trajectory since the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident.

Still, it was not until 2004 that Japanese public's attitude toward China turned considerably sour. Currently, this trend continues, and the 2005 poll results suggest that the Japanese public's attitude toward China is at its all-time low. Aggravated by issues such as the bilateral dispute over the East China Sea and concerns over Chinese military modernization, the atmosphere in Japan has become less and less conducive to a reconciliatory approach toward China.

Looking into the future, however, the Japanese, both the elite and general public alike, do have a desire to see an improvement in Japan's relationship with China. The opinion poll conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in February 2006 indicated that close to 78% of the respondents felt that the bilateral relationship should be improved. While the same poll also showed that a certain degree of realism exists among the Japanese about the future of the Japan-China relations, the existence of a clear desire for a better Japan-China relationship is good news.

Japan-ROK relations

Japan's relationship with the Republic of Korea is a complicated one. In contrast to Japanese attitude toward China, the Japanese public has long had a lukewarm attitude toward the Republic of Korea. This changed in 1998, when President Kim Dae-jung's visited Japan. During his visit, Kim announced that Korea would not bring up the history issue for the sake of a "forward-looking" relationship with Japan. Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi responded by putting the words of apology into their joint declaration.

Yet the five years under Koizumi seem to have undone the positive accomplishments in the Japan-Korea relations. While the relationship survived three Yasukuni Shrine visits by Prime Minister Koizumi, the 2005 poll results suggest the worsening of Japan's perception of the Republic of Korea. The flare-up of the disputed Tokdo/Takeshima territorial issue, the Japanese history textbook issue, President Roh's declaration of a "diplomatic war" against Japan, internal developments in ROK throughout 2005 (including the investigation of "pro-Japanese" behavior among Koreans during World War II), and, most important, the divergence of positions over the North Korean nuclear crisis have contributed to a loss of affinity toward the Republic of Korea among the Japanese public (which, of course, is more than fully reciprocated in terms of Korean attitudes toward Japan).

Nationalism in Japan

Some people warn that there are signs that narrow-minded nationalism is on the rise in Japan. Recent media accounts point to various acts of intimidation against politicians, government officials, business leaders and academics, and warn of a rise of "thought police" by extreme right-wing activists in Japan. Some in Japan also call attention to the emergence of what may be called "soft anti-American nationalism". This group is typically characterized as those who are: (1) inward-looking with an emphasis on traditional Japanese values; (2) critical of the United States, often based on their experience in studying and/or living in the United States; and (3) ambiguous about the desirability of the US-Japan alliance for Japan.

The acts of intimidation by right-wing groups and individuals which have been reported are indeed worrisome. It is also true that Japanese political leaders have not condemned such acts when they occur: the most they do is to say a few words when asked by press

for their reactions. However, it is also an overstatement to argue that the entire Japanese populace is embracing such an inward-looking strand of nationalism. For most Japanese, nationalism means "love for the country" and "pride in being Japanese." Furthermore, for most Japanese, being proud of Japan or of being Japanese equals their desire to see Japan share a due level of responsibility in the international community. In short, the nationalism that most Japanese identify with is closer to the patriotism we see in this country.

That said, a considerable proportion of Japanese are still uncertain about where they stand on this issue. The February 2006 public opinion poll conducted by the Cabinet Affairs Office revealed that since 1977, the percentage of those who are not sure whether they love their country has stayed at approximately 40% without any drastic change. The same poll also showed that close to 80% of the respondents felt that Japanese should be taught to nurture patriotism. This is hardly a picture of a population that is quickly leaning toward an inward-looking and violent nationalism.

III. Impact of the upcoming leadership change

Koizumi's five-year term is coming to a close. On September 20—approximately a week from today—the Liberal Democratic Party will choose a successor to Koizumi. On September 26, the House of Representatives will convene for an extraordinary session to select the new prime minister. How will the upcoming leadership change affect the issues that have been discussed so far?

As I mentioned in the beginning, it looks almost certain that Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe will be elected to succeed Koizumi and become Japan's next prime minister. As Members may already know, Abe is a third-generation politician from a conservative political family. His grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi served as prime minister when the United States and Japan revised their bilateral security treaty in 1960. His father, Shintaro Abe, served as foreign minister in 1980s and was one of the prime minister hopefuls of his generation until he passed away in 1991. Shinzo Abe himself was elected to the House of Representatives in 1993, and quickly rose through the ranks after Prime Minister Koizumi took the office.

Abe proposes that Japan should be a "beautiful country." In the areas of foreign policy, he stresses the strengthening of the US-Japan alliance and also vows to improve relations with China and the Republic of Korea. However, there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding what he really thinks about the issues that I have discussed above. For instance, he lays out "open conservatism" as one of the principles for his government, but it is not clear what he means by that. He also calls for setting a new constitution that is appropriate for today's Japan, but his policy platform does not reveal his thinking on the constitutional issues that are critical to Japanese foreign policy. There are also questions regarding his view on Japan's wartime history and his attitude toward nationalism. In particular, some in Japan argue that Abe's perspective on the nation's wartime history is more troublesome than Koizumi's. They argue that, while he did not stop visiting

Yasukuni, Koizumi repeatedly acknowledged that Japan must never forget its history of inflicting a great deal of pain and suffering on Japan's neighbors during World War II. In case of Abe, they point to the fact that he has raised questions regarding the legitimacy of the Tokyo War Crime Tribunals and question whether Abe's view on history in consistent with the conventional perspective.

Should Abe make us nervous? Will Abe move Japan so far to the right to the extent that it starts to be a concern for the United States? It is simply too early to tell.

One thing to keep in mind is that Abe will be operating under various constraints when he becomes a prime minister. Various opinion polls show that the public expects the next prime minister to improve relations with China and the Republic of Korea. Even if Abe hopes to visit the Yasukuni Shrine, for instance, it will be politically difficult for him to do so knowing that his predecessor's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine had a direct impact on Japan's deteriorating relationship with those two countries.

In fact, Abe's rise to power can be a real opportunity for Japan to improve its relationship with its immediate neighbors. Abe, having established a reputation as a conservative, is arguably in the best political position to reach out to China and Korea. Furthermore, there is a good chance that Abe's inclination to identify his political style with his grandfather Kishi also works in favor of such an outcome. Although Kishi is usually remembered as a bona fide conservative, he was also a pragmatist and made decisions based on what he considered as Japan's national interest. Abe has indicated a number of times how much he respects his grandfather's foresight in deciding to strengthen the US-Japan alliance. If Abe seeks to emulate his grandfather as prime minister, it is highly likely that he will embrace both aspects of Kishi's political style, conservatism and pragmatism. If that is the case, the coming months can present a real opportunity for improving Japan's relationship with China and the Republic of Korea.

While there is some uncertainty regarding Abe's personal views on certain issues, to what degree these views will be reflected in his policies remains unknown. We will know more as it becomes clear whom Abe will choose to fill the key positions both in the cabinet and within the Liberal Democratic Party. From the perspective of Japan's foreign and security policy, the positions to pay attention to will be as follows: foreign minister, defense minister, minister for economy and trade, economy and industry, chief cabinet secretary, and deputy chief cabinet secretary in charge of national security and crisis management.

IV. What can the United States do?

So far, I have discussed the internal developments within Japan on the issues that have attracted significant attention while Koizumi has been in the office. I would reiterate my original point that Japan's internal thinking is still evolving on all of these issues. What, then, can the United States do to ensure that an upcoming leadership transition in Japan will bring positive changes to Japan?

The United States can do a great deal by staying on message when communicating to Japan. That message should include the following elements: (1) Japan is an essential partner of the United States, (2) the United States understands that Japan is in the process of self-reflection and soul-searching for its proper role in the world, (3) the United States supports Japan's aspiration to play a greater role in world affairs, and (4) Japan's essentiality as a partner makes it just as important for the United States as it is for Japan that Japan has a positive and constructive relationship with China and the Republic of Korea. By staying on this message, the United States can empower the silent majority in Japan who want to see Japan expand its role in the international community on the one hand but remain committed to seeking reconciliation with China and the Republic of Korea on the other.

In fact, the US Congress can play an important role in this discourse. By revitalizing the existing framework of legislative exchange between US Congress and the National Diet of Japan and making it into a more robust program, Members can communicate these messages directly to political leaders in Japan. A more robust legislative exchange program can also be a venue in which Members express their concerns about certain developments in Japan as well. By engaging in dialogue with a wide variety of Japanese political leaders, Members of Congress can reassure their Japanese counterparts that the United States considers Japan as an important partner in the world, and while Washington does not interfere with domestic affairs in Japan, it also has a strong interest in how Tokyo addresses certain issues. As I say, this will go a long way in empower the silent majority of moderates in Japan, thereby ensuring that change in political leadership—from Koizumi to Abe and beyond—will bring about changes in Japan that allow it to be a positive and proactive player in Asia and beyond.

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Lantos, Members of the Committee, thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to your questions.